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Marie-Laure Ryan. Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu. *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative : Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet.*

Wendy Harding



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REFERENCES

Ryan, Marie-Laure. Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu. *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative : Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet*. Columbus, OH : Ohio State University Press, 2016. 254p, cloth ISBN : 978-0-8142-1299-8, paper ISBN : 978-0-8142-5263-5.

- 1 In the wake of Gerard Genette's *Figures I-III*, (1967-70) and Paul Ricoeur's *Temps et Récit* (1983-85), narratologists have been very much concerned with questions of time. The aim of *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative : Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* is to reorient the discipline by studying the ways in which "space can intersect with narrative" (1). To pursue this project, Marie-Laure Ryan, a literary specialist, has joined forces with two geographers, Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu in an endeavor that attempts to be truly interdisciplinary. The authors explain that while they took individual responsibility for developing different chapters, they worked as a team from the outset, exchanging ideas and sharing methodologies. The result is an innovative and wide-ranging study that begins with discussions of well-known literary texts such as Homer's *Odyssey* and Joyce's "Eveline" from *Dubliners* before moving on to other forms such as videogames, heritage sites and museums that also connect narrative to space.
- 2 The project the three writers have taken on has its potential pitfalls, not the least of which has to do with finding modes of address that can engage readers whose training

is weighted on the side of either literature or geography. The writers have had to judge how much discussion of either narratological or geographical concepts would be necessary to allow them to bridge disciplinary divides without giving either too much or too little emphasis to ongoing debates in the different fields. On the whole, the writers succeed in this endeavor. They provide definitions of the concepts they employ that are succinct enough not to irritate specialists and clear enough not to baffle outsiders. Moreover, their brief summaries of scholarly debates coupled with their well-chosen bibliographical references offer directions for readers interested in pursuing the topics further.

- 3 In focusing on space, the book takes on a concept that has proved increasingly difficult to pin down. Regrettably, the attempt at defining it is rather brief. The authors quickly list some of the major theories of space and place—those of Yi-Fu Tuan, Deleuze and Guattari, David Harvey, and Henri Lefebvre—but they do not discuss their differences or similarities, or the extent to which their own definitions overlap with their predecessors. In fact the distinctions the authors make between space and place, elaborated on page 7 of the book, have much in common with the foundational division between the abstract and the particular made by Newton and Locke in the seventeenth century, although the authors modify and complexify this modern bifurcation by fertilizing it with the ideas of the phenomenologists. Thus, the authors take space to denote “location, position, arrangement, distance, direction, orientation, and movement,” while they take place “to refer to the way environments and settings have been shaped and molded by human action and habitation, the qualities that make spaces unique” (7). However, the difficulty of making such distinctions emerges from outset in the book’s first case study of space in Joyce’s “Eveline.” The eponymous character’s movement in space, her outward orientation, is hard to separate from the particularity of her insertion in both time and place. Our understanding of the short story certainly gains from the close attention to location and orientation, but it also illustrates the porosity of the categories of space and place.
- 4 With its roots in structuralism, narratology tries to establish distinct categories based on clear oppositions. While they look for such distinctions, the authors are aware of the danger of applying categories too rigidly. From the first chapter (authored by Ryan) we find the caveat that a narrative model should not be used “like a cookie cutter,” but instead should be taken as “a flexible analytical instrument whose application to a given text depends on interpretative decisions and yields variable results” (37). Indeed, this could be both a description of the authors’ analytical procedures and a *vade mecum* for readers.
- 5 As its title suggests, *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative* deals both with space in narratives and narratives in space ; this double focus marks the book’s originality. For example, the authors treat the narrative potential of maps from many angles, discussing ways of mapping characters’ movements in narrative, the genesis of narrative in real or imaginary maps, readers’ cognitive maps of narrative space, maps that narrate the unfolding of historical events in space, and maps that guide visitors through museums. The book looks at narrative not only in its conventional literary sense, but also in its applicability to the street names, signs, plaques and inscriptions that city dwellers encounter every day without necessarily giving much thought to the stories they encapsulate. The study of these wide-ranging topics is enhanced by the many illustrations that make this book a pleasure to study and make the paper version

a much better choice than the Kindle text, whose visuals are impossible to examine in detail.

- 6 The broad scope of these authors' inquiry will certainly stimulate further interdisciplinary collaborations among scholars of literature and geography. Appropriately, the final chapter sketches out possible directions for future research.
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AUTHORS

WENDY HARDING

Professeur

Université de Toulouse 2-Jean Jaurès

harding@univ-tlse2.fr